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Supplement to "Notes for Bible Study."

No. III.

PAPERS FOR THE PRESENT TIME.

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THE ATONEMENT.

BY

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PAPERS FOR THE PRESENT TIME.

We hope to issue two of these papers each month. They will make in all some EIGHTEEN 16-page papers, uniform in size and style, so that when completed they can be bound in book form. The papers will be prepared by well known evangelical ministers and others—among whom are the following:—Revs. Dr. J. H. Brookes, W. J. Erdman, G. Cochran, P. McF. McLeod, H. M. Parsons, G. C. Needham, Robert Cameron, Albert Erdman, Vice-Chancellor Blake and Dr. Lyman H. A. Atwater.

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The subjects treated in this and the following papers, have been assigned to different Christian ministers, evangelists, and laymen, well and widely known for their deep devotion to the truths termed evangelical and scriptural. Each paper will be found distinct and complete in itself. Each writer is responsible for his own sentiments as uttered, and for *none* of the others.

Having this separate and independent treatment, it is believed the great doctrines here presented will have a wider distribution and reception among the people. The selected themes bear upon those great truths of Scripture which seem just now most imperilled by the assaults of the foe. It is in the earnest belief that many readers desire to know the divine meaning of many doctrines, about which much debate and distrust have recently arisen, that these "Papers for the Present Time" have been prepared, and now are to be issued. We heartily crave the blessing of Him who has revealed the true God, and by His Spirit exhorts us to "earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints"

H. M. PARSONS.

TORONTO, 16th May.

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THE ATONEMENT.

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There are two classes of objectors to orthodox truth. One we may call the ingenuous and honest: they do not mean to go wrong, but they are ignorant; they cannot quite see how this thing, that thing, and the other, are consistent; they do not find fault with these things;—they want to see through them. They believe that God can explain Himself; they are in sympathy with God; they wait upon Him; they pray over their difficulties; they ask God for light, and the result is that they soon emerge into a wide and wealthy place—the sweep of their horizon well defined—the sky above them cloudless.

To this class of objectors let us say, Dear brethren, we sympathize with you. So far you are right, and you will come out right. Follow after God; grapple your difficulties, face them, confront them with the Scripture. Then when you get a point, keep it; do not play at shuttlecock. Remember what St. Paul says to the Philippians—“Brethren, whereto we have already attained, let us square ourselves by it”—*στοιχεῖν κατ’ ὅντι*—let us keep up to the mark, let us be fixed in our conviction; and, “if in anything ye be otherwise minded,” doubtful, not clear as yet, “God will reveal even this unto you.”

The second class of objectors is composed of the disingenu-

ous, and the dishonest. They are not right within. They are not for God and for the truth, let it cut how it may. They are not manly. They do not bare their breasts to the knife. They do not say "Search me O God, and *see*, and *lead* me in the way everlasting." They do not make their objections as led by the Spirit, and as depending on the Spirit, but they make them in order to self-justification. Their object is not to vindicate God, but to apologize for themselves. It is with them, self, *self*, SELF, all the way through.

How does this come about? How does it occur that many professors of religion, many, many in this evil day are in this second class?

There are several reasons, but they all resolve themselves into one—the *fallacy of living on an old experience*.

If you talk with certain professors of religion, you always find them going back to a point in their history which they call their conversion. On this they stake everything. They take it for granted that their conversion was right, and therefore they are right. But what was the conversion? In nine cases out of ten a mere spasm, a convulsion of the unregenerate moral nature—a mixture of conviction, passion, and self-righteous resolution—the shudder of a serpent who is trying to right himself by straight lines. That is all.

Now think for a moment of the straight lines that radiate from God. Those straight lines never cross nor cut. Suppose you, my brother, are right—a little straight line—then you will live in God's straight line and no other can cut you. But suppose you are wrong, a crooked line, a serpent—for the serpent is the emblem of the crooked line in the Scripture—then the straight lines must cut you, and the more you twist, the more they must cut you, until you drop in inch pieces through the siftings of the pure white light of God. My brother, if you are resting on a false experience, you cannot be easy or happy under God's truth. In spite of yourself, you will doubt and you will suggest doubt—you will question and criticize and cavil. The only thing for you is to get rid of that experience—to sponge it from your record—to forget you ever had it, and to begin with Christ. *Dead men do not stir*. If ever you

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see yourself dead you will stop talking about experience. What experience can a corpse have? If once you see that Christ saves of mere mercy—instantly saves you—saves you not for your emotions but in spite of your emotions—in spite of the shallow deceitfulness of your tears—that will end it. You will no longer hope, but trusting in Christ you will *know*. Self will drop out, and Christ will take the place of experience. From that time you will live in the present and no longer in the past. No longer will you inquire what was true or untrue, yesterday, or yesterday a week, or yesterday a twelvemonth. Forgetting the things that are behind, you will live where Paul lived—in God's golden, everlasting NOW—"the life which I *now* live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me."

But why has not God made things so clear that men cannot object? For several reasons.

1. The nature of truth, of all truth, exposes it to objection. Truth always involves more than appears on the surface. The Indian savage who lies upon his back beneath the starlit heavens fancies that the sky above him is a broad blue blanket, and those stars, gilt spangles loosely scattered over it. To La Place or Herschell the same heavens are depths of infinite space crowded with rolling worlds, each one of which describes an exact mathematical circle—each one of which is subordinate—satellite to planet, planet to sun, and sun to far-binding Pleiad. Now to this scheme of La Place and Herschell, the savage would have many objections. In contrast with his first untutored impression, how would it be possible for him to prefer the slow results of calculation and the minute reports which come to him through the lenses of the telescope?

Precisely so is it with the Bible, that heaven of the moral universe. Like the savage, men look upon its statements as a congeries of isolated truths, confused, conflicting, contradictory, scattered over the 900 pages less or more of this book. The idea that there is a system here—that that system lies open to investigation—that it can be measured in all its expanses and fixed in all its details, and that in the line of patient discovery each truth falls into place and marches in the orbit of undeviat-

ing purpose around the central and all-dominating thought of God, is an idea which ignorant, hasty and unthoughtful men have overlooked, and yet, if God be like Himself, and if the God of the universe be the God of the Bible, what other thing can be? You must either consent to investigate—to use the mind that God has given you upon the things of God—patiently to learn in a “comparison of spiritual things with spiritual,” or else, my brother, like the untutored savage, your independent and undisciplined free thought will check you at the threshold of moral advancement and bar you from the knowledge of what God is forever. But,

2. The nature of fallen man prevents God from making things so clear to him that he cannot object.

The nature of fallen man is opposed to God; and that opposition lies in the *mind* to begin with. It is the carnal *mind* that is enmity against God. Do you know anything from experience of the difficulty of stating yourself to men who dislike you, who have prejudged you and whose interest it is to make you out wrong? That is the difficulty, on an infinite scale, which God has to contend with. God is right, and He must put Himself right. But that puts the sinner wrong and then the sinner must justify himself. It has been truly said to be “a law of man’s intelligent nature that when accused of wrong either by conscience, or by some other agent, he must either confess or justify.” The latter is the sinner’s alternative. This is the reason why he has so many objections and why he flies from one to another, as if the aggregate of his objections would make up for the intrinsic weakness of each. Alas! behind all this dishonesty, behind all this evasion there is that which nothing but the touch and the renewal of the Holy Ghost can cure—the inveterate opposition of the man to God.

All objections to the Christian system are, in the last analysis, objections to the doctrine of vicarious atonement. Hence the pertinency of the question, “What think ye of Christ?” What think ye of His Deity? What think ye of His dying? What think ye of the nature and the limitations of His work?

“What think ye of Christ? is the test
To try both your state and your scheme;
You cannot be right in the rest
Unless you think rightly of Him.”

This being the case, the Holy Spirit, in removing a sinner's objections—in reducing him from a state of combativeness to one of willing reception—aims from first to last, at setting Christ before him. "Casting down *imagination*," says the apostle, "and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God and bringing into captivity every *thought* to the obedience of Christ." My brother, my sister, what you want is the obedience of Christ—the obedience of which Christ is the source and object—the obedience which comes from Christ and terminates on Christ. Christ is the end of nature's quest and questionings—the all-atoning Chr.st.

Let us, then, for a few moments, fix our eyes on Christ—on Christ in His most central and soul-saving aspect—on Christ exemplifying these three things:

I. THE TRUTH OF THE ATONEMENT.

II. ITS HOLINESS.

III. ITS SAVING POWER.

I. The Truth of the Atonement—what it is not, what it is—and,

FIRST. It is not what is called *Humanitarianism*—that Christ was a good Man, divine in some sense, who appeared among us as an example, to show us how to be holy; so that if we follow Him and do the best we can, we shall be saved. That this is not what the Bible means by the cross is evident—

(1.) From the fact that it leaves the question of past sin untouched. We know that Lady Macbeth, in utterance of the necessity of nature, cries—

"Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood
Clean from my hand?"

It is a question of washing away blood which has already stained.

(2.) This notion is untrue because it mocks us. To present a faultless model of perfection to a fallen creature helplessly depraved—to say to him, "Be like this," "Do like this," is to make ghastly sport of his misery.

(3.) The life of the Lord Jesus Christ down here was a life of suffering unto death. What sort of an example does that afford to you and to me who wish to escape death? What sort of an example to a lost sinner is a crucifix?

(4.) An atonement in which we follow Christ and do the best we can, is an atonement in which man and not Christ is the Atoner. We follow Christ! At what distance? At our own distance. Then the distance may widen—the interval may stretch, until at last Christ minified to a mere speck, a point upon the dim horizon, passes out and vanishes clean from His own atonement and leaves behind just this—"Man, woman, do the best you can, or try to do it, or do something, and you shall be saved."

SECOND. The Atonement is not a device of general and governmental benevolence—a mere theatrical display calculated to make an impression on the universe, and so to prevent the spread of sin, bring sinners to repentance, and secure harmony and happiness upon the largest scale.

It is well known that this has been a popular and a widespread representation: it is an untrue representation, however, because it is based on the following untrue assumptions.

(1.) That sin does not deserve to be punished because it is sin, but only because of its consequences.

(2.) That there is no such thing as an eternal justice in God striking down upon sin: God is breadth only,—love, an horizontal line and not a cross—that there is no perpendicular in Him. "Justice," say the teachers of our modern liberalistic thought, "is benevolence guided by wisdom;" in other words, it is a general good will and good nature in God which keeps up a government in order to the happiness of His creatures. God, then, exists for His creatures; He is not His own highest end. And God is righteous not because His holy nature compels Him to be, but because the interests of a governmental policy demand it.

The theory stripped of its plausibilities, and stated in broad terms and carried to its logical results, is this: Happiness is the end of creation—in order to happiness there must be

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righteousness—righteousness, therefore, is a means to an end. In other words, virtue is simply expediency, and the question of right and wrong is simply a question of profit or loss.

Such, squarely stated, is the modern and popular notion of the Atonement—a notion born of philosophy and not of Christ—a notion without a word of Scripture to support it—a notion utterly repugnant to the sentiments of every honest heart—a way since sin is in the universe, not of coming straight out and dealing with sin; but of *getting around it*. A way of doing something, no one knows what, but something of which the cross is a voucher, by which the machinery of the universe is kept running, its ruin is averted and a door is opened; no one knows exactly where, and no one knows exactly on what conditions, to God.

Before dismissing the theory of the Atonement it is pertinent to add these two remarks:

FIRST. This theory goes far, and more than far to explain the perplexity of the masses under certain modern sermons. Many men and many Christians complain that they cannot understand what is said—that they cannot take it away. They think the fault is in themselves, their ignorance, their obtuseness, but it is not so. A straight line is the shortest distance between two points. The Gospel is a straight line, and anybody can understand a straight line. The fault, in these cases, is not so much with the people as with the pulpit. It is because the preacher is muddled himself. It is because he is floundering about in a net-work of moral absurdities which have no coherence, no beginning, nor middle nor end. It is because he is trying to preach a philosophy which is not the gospel—which is anything but the gospel, and which gives an open contradiction to the Bible, and to common sense, and God.

Another remark proper at this point is this—the dishonesty now prevalent in our churches, the moral obliquity, the squint in the eye, common to so many professors of religion, is chargeable to this false theory of the atonement. Men listen to the preaching and they get a notion that the universe is a machine—that God is running it, and that He is behind pulling wires.

What is the inference from this? Is it not that they too may pull wires? Men listen to the preaching and they get the notion that *salvation is a piece of diplomacy*. God is a diplomat, why should not they be diplomats? God's virtue is "what is expedient;" why should not their virtue be "what is expedient?" With God the end covers the crookedness of the means, why with them should not the end cover the crookedness of the means? Nothing is more certain than this, that men will be politic so long as they believe in a politic God.

SECOND. Having thus cleared the ground before us—having stated what the atonement is not, it will not be difficult now to state what it is. All truth is quickly stated, and this truth lies in one word, SUBSTITUTION. It is put with all possible plainness in the parallel, the sublime equation of 2 Cor. v. 21, "For He hath made Him to be sin for us"—identified Him with it so as to make Him wholly chargeable therewith—"that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him,"—that we might be identified and wholly chargeable with righteousness.

The doctrine stated in contrast and for distinctness is this,

(1.) Sin, because it *is* sin, *must* be punished.^(a)

(2.) Justice, because it *is* justice, must punish sin.^(b)

(3.) If sin is on the sinner, then justice must strike through both sin and the sinner who carries it.^(c)

(4.) If the sin of the believing sinner is taken from his shoulders and laid upon the Son of God, then justice, still following after the sin, must strike through the sin and the person of the Son of God now underneath it.^(d)

(a). Rom. vi. 23. The wages of sin, the thing due to it, which must be paid, is death.

(b). Gen. xviii. 25: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Pay sin what is due to it?

(c). Ezek. xviii. 20: "The soul that sinneth it shall die." Ex. xxxiv. 7: "He will by no means clear the guilty."

(d). Isa. liii. 5: "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed."

(5). When justice once strikes the Son of God, justice exhausts itself. Sin is amerced in an Infinite Object.^(e)

(6). Not only is this true, but more—not only does justice exhaust itself, but, striking an Infinite Object, justice meets a *rebound*, is reflected back upon God, and now God must *reward* Christ, as the substitute, for His overplusage of infinite merits.^(f) Therefore,

(7). The moment the believing sinner accepts Christ as his substitute, he finds himself not only freed from his sin, but *rewarded*. He gets all heaven because of the glory and merits of Christ.^(g)

The Atonement, then, which we preach is one of absolute exchange.^(h) It is that Christ took our place literally, in order that we might take His place literally—that God regarded and treated Christ as the sinner and that He regards and treats the believing sinner as Christ.⁽ⁱ⁾ From the moment we believe, God looks upon us as if we were Christ.^(j) He takes it as if Christ's atonement had been our atonement, and as if Christ's life had been our life, and He beholds, accepts, blesses and rewards as though all Christ was and did had been ours.^(k)

Perhaps an illustration here may serve to put the fact in

(e). Rom. viii. 3: "God sending *His own Son* in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh." Zech. xiii. 7: "Awake, O sword, against *my* shepherd, and against the Man that is *My Fellow*, saith the Lord."

(f). Isa. xl. 20, lxii. 11: "His *reward* is with Him, and His *recompense* (see margin) before Him." Isa. liii. 12: "Therefore will I divide Him a portion with the great," &c. Phil. ii. 6: "Wherefore God hath highly exalted Him," &c. Heb. ii. 9: "Crowned Him with glory and honor."

(g). John xvii. 22: "The *glory* which Thou gavest Me, I have given them." Rom. v. 17: "Shall reign in life by One, Jesus Christ."

(h). I. Pet. iii. 18: "For Christ also hath suffered, the Just for (*ὕπέρ*, instead of) the unjust, to bring us to God."

(i). II. Cor. v. 21: "He hath made Him to be sin for us," &c.

(j). John iv. 17: "As He is so are we in this world." John xvii. 23; I. Cor. xii. 12; Eph. v. 30.

(k). Rom. v. 10: "Justified by His blood; saved by His life." Rom. v. 21: "Grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord."

clearer light. Near the village of Portage, on the Genesee river, there is a bridge. This bridge spans a chasm of six hundred feet, and is entirely constructed of timbers. These timbers are so placed that any single one may be removed without interfering with the others, and so, as timbers rot, they are replaced, and the bridge itself is rendered perpetual. Now, suppose a rotten timber somewhere in the Portage bridge,—the workmen are called together and that timber is taken out and a sound timber is put in its place. What part, after that, does the rotten timber play in sustaining the bridge? What is it that sustains the bridge *now*? The sound timber—the *substitute*. The rotten timber lies there, on the muddy bank of the river. It is wholly thrown out. Now that will do as a representation of the sinner, and the bridge of Adam's broken covenant of works. The sinner is a rotten timber. He is wholly worthless. God comes along and throws him out. He supersedes him. He puts Christ in his place. He lays on Christ the weight of the bridge of salvation, and Christ alone sustains it. Your good works, my brother, have nothing more to do with your justification before God than the worthless, rotten timber lying on the mudflats of the Genesee has to do with the complete and colossal structure which bridges its banks.

We then are saved, straight through eternity, by what the Son of God has done in our place. "By Him all that believe are *justified from all things*." Other considerations have nothing to do with it. It matters nothing what we have been, what we are, or what we shall be. From the moment we believe on Christ, we are forever, in God's sight, AS CHRIST.

Of course it is involved in this that men are saved, *not by preparing first*, that is by repenting, and praying, and reading the Bible, and then trusting Christ; nor by the converse of this, that is by trusting Christ first *and then preparing something*—repentance, reformation, good works—which God will accept; but that sinners are saved irrespective of what they are—how they feel—what they have done—what they hope to do—by trusting on Christ and that only. That Christ, and Christ alone, stands between any sinner and the Lake of Fire, and that the instant Christ is seen and rested on, the soul's

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eternity, by God's free promise, and regardless of all character and works, is fixed.

Such is the doctrine of Vicarious Atonement, a doctrine which, for grandeur, for simplicity, and comprehensiveness, stands peerless and alone—God's thought in felt, in acknowledged, in adorable contrast to all creature philosophies—God's thought which solves all problems and allays all apprehensions and, beyond all power of tongue to tell it, satisfies the heart. But

II. Is it a holy doctrine? Objection has been brought against it. It has been said that such an exchange as this, in which the innocent is made to suffer for the guilty, is unjust; that it is exceptional, arbitrary, contrary to all processes of human law; that it is at variance with the moral feelings of mankind, and that it tends to immorality.

To this objection, so succinctly stated, it is easy to reply.

FIRST. So far from being exceptional, the principle of representation runs through the universe. It is the principle on which the world is built. When a father commits a crime his whole family sink in the social scale, though innocent. When a father is lifted to office or to honor his whole family are lifted without merit of their own. These examples go to prove that so far from being exceptional, the scheme on which the Lord Jesus Christ acts as agent, or trustee, or substitute of His people is congruous not only with the whole Scriptural theology, but with what we see around us, and with the very nature of things. If we fell by Adam's sin without having a hand in it, why may we not be raised again by Christ's righteousness without having any righteousness of our own? But,

SECOND. The substitution of the Lord Jesus Christ is not *arbitrary*. He was not forced to suffer. He was not dragged an unwilling victim to the altar, and there, in spite of all His pleadings, and of all His protestations, offered up. On the contrary, nothing was ever so voluntary as the death of Christ—"I *delight* to do Thy will"—"How am I *straitened* until it be accomplished?" He *loved* us and gave Himself for us. *Volenti nulla fit injuria.*

He is not wronged who gives his free consent. Christ was master of His own life as Lord of all. He had power to lay it down and to take it up again, and in this supreme devotion the Blessed Trinity concurred.

THIRD. The substitution of the Lord Jesus Christ is indeed contrary to *our processes of law*, but not because it contravenes them; it rises above and passes beyond their finite limitations. That is all. It is readily admitted that no human justice could hang one man because another man had committed murder; but what to human justice, hampered by conditions, is impossible, is possible with God.

One thing: human justice has no power over life; the State is not absolute, but God is. The disposal of life for life, which is not man's prerogative, belongs to God.

Another thing: Under a human government, no one has a right, even voluntarily, to give up his life under law for another; for man has not power over his own life when it comes to justice, but Christ had power over His.

Once more: Under a human government, if one dies for another, *one life is lost*. The victim perishes, and there is no surplus gain to the universe. But, in the glorious Atonement, no life is lost, no victim perishes, for Christ who goes down into the grave rises again triumphant—"dieth no more"—death hath no more dominion over Him.

FOURTH. The principle of substitution, so far from being at *variance with the feelings of a holy and a humble heart*, is, of all principles that which such a heart must welcome as the only possible extrication from the agonies of conviction. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die!" Has God said it? Then it must be. Then the soul must die, either in its separate personality, or in the Larger Personality which covers it—either in itself, or in the Head of the great family to which, *believing*, it belongs. Amid the growing light, this sun-like truth stands clear, *Die the sinner must, or Jesus!*

FIFTH. The doctrine of Substitution does not tend to immorality. Objection has sometimes been expressed like this—

"If I understand it, I, by trusting, though the worst and most abandoned sinner out of hell, am saved—saved in a clock-tick—saved as truly and as certainly as Paul himself, who is in glory. If I understand it, the whole question of my destiny is settled, over and done, the moment I consent to believe! Now, I am surprised at this doctrine. It takes away my breath. I am afraid of it. It seems to me, if I knew that my eternity were settled, I should run straight into excess—I should argue "It makes no difference—I am saved anyhow—a little sin more or less will not count."

The answer to this objection is that it is the result of a truth but half apprehended. The sinner who makes it is like a man who is looking at one arm of a walking-beam, he does not know how the arm on the other side works. It is a mistake to suppose that settling things upon a righteous basis tends to laxity. The fact is just the reverse. Take an illustration from the *angels*. Their destiny is settled and has been settled for ages. *In all heaven there is not a doubt*. No angel ever doubts his eternal salvation; but that does not tend to make angels immoral. Take an illustration from the case of a wife. Will any one say that for a woman to know she is married, and fixed by a permanent tie, tends to make her immoral? Does not every one know that the possibility of divorce entertained, makes people immoral—that doubt in this thing, is its death? Does not every one know that the strongest bond of all social life and the surest defence of all social honor is the fiat "whom God hath joined together, let not man put asunder?"

But argue the question a moment, along the line of its merits.

(1.) To trust in Christ is to *obey God*. "This is His commandment that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ." Without faith it is impossible to please Him; hence men must be brought to the obedience of faith. When they believe, for the first time in their lives, they begin to obey. But, does beginning to obey God tend to make men immoral?

(2.) To trust Christ is to *draw near to Christ*; but how can that make men immoral? Faith is nothing but coming to Christ under the attractions of a Divine, unspeakable, all holy, all compelling love. It is the rebound of gratitude in us towards Him who died for us. "To Whom coming as to a Living Stone." Coming, coming, always coming—how can that make men immoral?

(3.) To trust Christ is to *yield to the Spirit of God*. For the first time in your life, instead of resisting, you yield. What is the result? You *keep* yielding. More and more you give yourself up to the Spirit's control. You are taught by the Spirit. You are led by the Spirit. You are strengthened by the Spirit. You are filled with the Spirit. You are born again of the Spirit. How can that make you immoral?

But finally, to end discussion by an ultimate appeal, the question whether Substitution is a holy doctrine, is the question, whether the Bible, which proclaims it, is a holy book. It will be noticed that not one of the objections canvassed is brought forward from the Scripture. They are all of them objections, speculations, reasonings and cavils of the carnal heart. To confute the Scripture, men must bring forward Scripture. Until they do this, the doctrine of Vicarious Atonement will stand. It will stand because the Bible teaches it; because what the Bible teaches, God teaches; and because what God teaches must eternally be true.

III. Is this doctrine *saving*? God says so. Millions in the past have proved it. Millions in the present are embarked upon it. You yourself have known many who have died trusting it. Not one of all these has it failed. It will not fail you. Try it, my brother. You never have tried it. You never have *dropped yourself a dead weight* on the hands of Christ and gone away believing that salvation was settled. You never have done this, and yet this is the point, the single point of the Gospel. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life!"

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